

Hysen's Health Clinic

About Herbal Medicine.

Herbal medicine technically consists of the use of herbaceous plants, many of which have healing properties, but in practice refers to a form of healing that uses natural substances that includes plants and plant parts, but also other natural biological and mineral substances.

The origins of herbal medicine have been lost in the mists of time, and it is effectively the oldest form of medicine of all. Most higher animals are known to seek out specific plants when they are ill; while some primates are known to instruct their young what parts of certain plants to eat for a given illness; a knowledge they in turn teach to their own offspring. It is therefore not surprising that every human culture on this planet has its own herbal medicine lore; and as far as we can judge from history and archeology, this has always been the case. In fact, until relatively modern times, herbal medicine was the only form of medicine in use.

Over the centuries herbal medicine was a common illness-countering mainstay in every home, and most families had at least one family member that was versed in herbal lore. Of course there were also the expert herbalists, such as the "medicine men (and women)" and the "herbal doctors" that would be consulted in order to deal with more serious cases.

This long history means that there are thousands of plant and other substances that have known therapeutic properties. This is the reason why many modern medical cures for serious and even fatal diseases were originally derived from herbal medicines, and why research by science into herbal medicine, in order to discover cures for medically incurable conditions, continues.



Scientific Research into Herbal Medicine.

In the last three or four decades an enormous amount of scientific research has taken place into herbal medicine in an attempt to find answers to conditions ranging from influenza to cancer and Alzheimer's disease. Scientists have not only tested exotic plants, but

Nature, the original source of all medicines.

commonly used herbs and other natural medicines have been also scrutinised. The result has been, almost without exception, that the claims made by traditional herbalists as regards the therapeutic properties of their medicines have been vindicated. The problem with natural medicines for modern scientific researchers is that most of these are chemically very complex, as one would expect from living things, and that in most cases a large number of compounds work together to provide the healing effect. This makes it too difficult to synthesize the active principles in a laboratory, so science simply moves on. This does not mean however that anyone has to wait for science to find the chemical compounds that suit their commercial interests; the healing power of herbs and other natural medicines is always available to the human race.

Forms of Herbal Medicines.

Firstly, broadly speaking, herbal medicines are used in two forms: 1. "Simples" and 2. "Compounds".

Simples consist of one ingredient only, while compounds are composed of more than one ingredient and can contain many ingredients. The advantage of simples is that only a small number of herbs need to be kept on the shelf, while compounds require a large stock of many different ingredients. The disadvantage of simples is that they often have to be taken in rather large doses, meaning that problems can arise from overdosing. On the other hand compound contain a number of ingredients in much smaller amounts, which are usually selected because they are known work together; this means that compounds often have enhanced efficacy of simples, but are much less likely to cause problems by overdosing.

Secondly, herbal medicines can be used either externally or internally. External herbal medicines may take the form of extracts such as lotions, ointments or creams that are supplied to affected areas, while internal medicines are ingested in one form or another.

Originally herbs for internal use had their healing properties extracted by means of steeping or boiling in water; or by being steeped in some beverage containing alcohol. Nowadays high quality alcoholic herbal extracts that can easily be blended together by the herbalist tend to be used in Western herbal medicine, while in Chinese herbal



Some commonly used herbs.



A typical Herbalist's shop, a supplier of unprocessed herbs.

medicine pills and tablets made from freeze-dried aqueous (water) extract of herbal combinations are the most common form of herbal medicine.

Conditions Commonly Treated By Herbal Medicine.

As might be expected, there is really no condition that cannot be treated by herbal medicine. However, modern pharmaceutical advances have enabled science to synthesize some of the active principles of traditional herbal medicines, with the result that previously dangerous infections can be treated effectively, while others may be prevented by means of inoculation. And although much progress has been made by modern medicine in being able to control the symptoms of chronic disease, and at times being able to slow its progress, the actual cure-rate of these diseases remains disappointing, leaving a lot of scope for the older true and tried approaches of herbal medicine.



Modern forms of herbal medicines: herbal tablets, herbal pills, herbal capsules, herbal liquid extract and powdered freeze-dried herbal extract.

Safety and Efficacy of Herbal Medicine.

As in most cases herbal medicine and conventional medicine can be used in tandem, this provides an additional option for the "disappointed" patient. It must be remembered however that herbal medicines and modern drugs can interact, it is therefore of utmost importance that any treatment by herbal medicine is done under the guidance of a qualified herbal practitioner who also has training in pharmacology, as is the case in our clinic.

Duration of Treatment by Herbal Medicine.

The time required to treat a health condition by means of herbal medicine varies. Acute conditions such as colds or influenza usually show results in one or two days, but chronic conditions can take much longer to treat. The duration of a treatment does not only depend on the severity of the condition, but also on the strength of the immune system. Run down and damaged constitutions take more time to "get back on their feet" and this means more time will be required to achieve full health; while those who are basically "fit"

and/or have a good constitution will improve, relatively speaking, much faster.

And although herbal medicine cannot cure instantly or cure everything, it is still the oldest medicine on the planet, and as most of those who have used it will agree, by far the best.

[Practitioners](#)[Home](#)[The Clinic](#)[Acupuncture](#)[Homeopathy](#)[Naturopathy](#)[Top of Page](#)

Copyright © Paul Hysen PhD. December 2010